

VZCZCXYZ0000
OO RUEHWEB

DE RUEHUL #0682/01 0950822
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
O 040822Z APR 08
FM AMEMBASSY SEOUL
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9226
INFO RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING PRIORITY 4056
RUEHMO/AMEMBASSY MOSCOW PRIORITY 8634
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 4210
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI PRIORITY
RUALSFJ/COMUSJAPAN YOKOTA AB JA PRIORITY
RUACAAA/COMUSKOREA INTEL SEOUL KOR PRIORITY
RHMFISS/COMUSKOREA J5 SEOUL KOR PRIORITY
RHMFISS/COMUSKOREA SCJS SEOUL KOR PRIORITY
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC//OSD/ISA/EAP// PRIORITY

UNCLAS SEOUL 000682

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [KN](#) [KS](#) [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [PREL](#)

SUBJECT: FINAL POLLS POINT TO GNP MAJORITY

¶1. (U) SUMMARY: With general elections less than a week away, the ruling Grand National Party (GNP) is poised to secure a significant majority in the National Assembly. The latest polling data) the last to be released before April 9 according to election law stipulations) revealed that of the 245 district seats (299 including proportional seats) the GNP is expected to win in 107-145 districts, with the main opposition liberal United Democratic Party (UDP) expected to take anywhere from 46-71. The UDP is not likely to achieve its projected goal of winning 100 seats, the number necessary to block constitutional revisions, and is therefore touting its underdog opposition role in the hopes of appealing to the estimated 30 percent of undecided voters. As for the remaining parties, the independents are leading in 16 districts. Conservative hardliner Lee Hoi-chang, s Liberty Forward Party (LFP) is ahead in 9 districts, and others in 5. In accordance with these polling results, South Korean press reports project that the GNP will win roughly 30 proportional seats, securing over 170 in total. The UDP on the other hand would likely come out with about 90 seats. END SUMMARY.

METRO AREA = PULSE OF THE PUBLIC

¶2. (U) The Seoul metropolitan area holds 45 percent of the total seats and as South Korea's political hub is considered a make-or-break region for these elections. While the ruling party initially was expected to have a sweeping victory here, competition became fierce as Lee Myung-bak's approval ratings fell to around 35 percent; the contests' results in this area will therefore offer insight into the public's evaluation of Lee's performance in the first month of his administration and indicate to what extent the public is willing to support his policies. In Seoul, the ruling GNP is leading in 23-34 of the 48 constituencies, the UDP in 4-12, and former presidential candidate Moon Kook-hyun's Creative Korea Party (CKP) is ahead in one. In Incheon, the GNP is leading in 6-7 of the 12 districts, and the UDP in 1-3. Of the 51 seats in the Gyeonggi province, the ruling party is ahead in 20-21 and the UDP in 9-10. All remaining districts are caught up in tight races.

LFP TAKES CHUNGCHAEONG

¶3. (U) The Chungcheong region is crucial for the LFP to gain

enough seats towards forming a floor negotiation group (20 seats). Of the total 24 seats available, GNP candidates are ahead in 3-5 districts, the UDP in 3-4, the LFP in 7-9, and the remaining races show no clear winner. In Gyeongsang, the GNP's traditional stronghold, ruling party candidates are ahead in 50-60 of the 68 constituencies. The Pro-Park Alliance candidates and independents who previously lost GNP nominations are not proving to be formidable opponents; only one pro-Park candidate, Hong Sa-duk, seems to have a chance at winning in the region according to the latest polls.

UDP UP IN HONAM, INDEPENDENTS FIGHT THE GOOD FIGHT

14. (U) In the Honam region of North and South Jeolla, traditionally a bastion of liberal support, the UDP is leading in 25-27 of the 31 districts, but liberal independent candidates are beginning to draw more attention. Consistent with their usual voting pattern of choosing candidates based on regional loyalty, voters in Honam are beginning to grow more attuned to the candidates' promises of change) especially on the economy - and the UDP is working overtime to win what used to be shoo-in votes. Unaffiliated candidates who were rejected in the UDP nomination process hold a lead in 2-4 cities and counties in Jeolla to include Mokpo, Muan, and Shinan. Of these, Mokpo is being spotlighted as former President Kim Dae-jung's close aide Park Jie-won, with 35 percent support, is leading his UDP opponent Chung Young-sik, who has 23 percent support.

KANGWON AND JEJU

15. (U) The competition in Kangwon and Jeju is evenly split - while the GNP candidates are strong overall, the UDP is leading in two constituencies, and competition is fierce in another two districts. In Jeju, UDP candidates hold a slight lead over their GNP counterparts in two of three districts.

KEY RACES AND FACES

16. (U) UDP chairman Sohn Hak-kyu and former presidential candidate Chung Dong-young face likely losses in their highly-publicized contests with key GNP figures Park Jin and Chung Mong-joon. Close Lee Myung-bak supporter Park Jin is well ahead of Sohn in the highly-coveted Jongno district of Seoul at 44 percent while Sohn rates at about 30 percent. Chung Mong-joon is ahead of his UDP rival Chung Dong-young by more than 20 percentage points, although recent allegations of sexual harassment may sway some undecided voters and result in a tighter race than expected. Key Lee supporters such as Lee Jae-o (33 percent) and GNP Secretary General Lee Bang-ho (44.8 percent) are struggling in their respective contests against the liberal Creative Korea Party's Moon Kook-hyun (49 percent) and the liberal Democratic Labor Party's Kang Ki-gap (31.9 percent).

COMMENT

17. (SBU) South Korean press reports note that this year's general elections will likely see a record-low voter turnout, probably due to an apathetic younger generation and both major parties' "no-policy" policy. Even the recent wave of harsh rhetoric from the North is unlikely to influence voters, as candidates continue to forego policy debates in favor of appeals to regional and party affiliation. All things being equal, a low voter turnout will likely bolster the GNP's chances for a strong majority, as precedent shows that older, traditionally GNP-leaning voters will show up to the polls while younger voters stay at home.

VERSHBOW